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ABSTRACT

MULTIGRADE PLANNING-TEACHING TEAMS, INITIATED IN THE LABORATORY SCHOOL OF CENTRAL WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGE, HAVE PROVED EFFECTIVE IN IMPROVING INSERVICE EDUCATION. THE TEAM CONCEPT IS BASED UPON THE ASSUMPTIONS THAT THE TEACHER MUST KNOW HIS STUDENTS AND, ALSO, HAVE SOME DEGREE OF SPECIALIZATION IN THE VARIOUS SUBJECT AREAS. EACH MULTIGRADE TEAM IS RESPONSIBLE FOR GUIDING THREE CLASS-SIZED GROUPS OF STUDENTS IN CONSECUTIVE GRADES THROUGH A 3-YEAR SEQUENCE. THE TEAMS MEET REGULARLY FOR VARYING LENGTHS OF TIME AND EACH MEMBER OF A TEAM PROVIDES LEADERSHIP IN A SUBJECT AREA BY INFORMING OTHER MEMBERS ABOUT CURRENT RESEARCH AND PRACTICES AND BY GIVING DIRECTION TO INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING. CONTINUING INSERVICE EDUCATION THEN OCCURS AUTOMATICALLY THROUGH INFORMATION EXCHANGE, AND PROBLEMS IN PARTICULAR AREAS OF INSTRUCTION ARE CARRIED OUT BY THE TEAM "SPECIALIST." (LH)

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The Inservice Education Potential Of Team Planning-Teaching

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A decade ago, Harold Spears wrote that inservice education is "a concept that has swept the country in a period of a few years," and that it enlisted a significantly greater percentage of the teaching personnel than pure curriculum reorganization could. Dr. Spears included in his Principles of Inservice Training suggestions that continuous professional training of teachers is essential, continuous teaching experience alone is not enough, school systems are obligated to provide inservice opportunities, inservice education is a legitimate school expense, the test of success of inservice programs is whether or not desired changes in pupil behavior occur, and that inservice education is a part of curriculum planning and supervision.

Later, Kimball Wiles wrote about inservice education, "Although the motives are good, the results satisfy almost no one." Wiles charges that many teachers view the activities as unimportant and resist attending. He suggests that educators might look at the experience of agriculture where demonstration and experimental farms were found to be by far the best way to encourage farmers to change their methods. If, Wiles contends, supervisors were paying attention to what research says about leadership being widespread and diffused, they would recognize that most of the influencing of teachers in a school will be by other teachers, and not by resource people from the central office. The money best used is that spent on the people who will really lead the thought and effort in the school. He recommends support for such activities as: study of the research on some pertinent topic, experiments, seminars to consider the evidence gained from the experiments, demonstration of practices thus perfected, clinical experience related to the demonstration, and widespread dissemination of what is learned.

Spears and Wiles are long-time leaders in the field of curriculum development and supervision. Their somewhat differing positions should not be interpreted as a difference in philosophy. In many ways the Wiles activities are quite consistent with the Spears principles. Their conclu-

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sions, however, do seem to differ.

Those concerned with the problems of professional growth of teachers, and with the even more difficult problem of fostering needed innovation, would do well to examine what the writings of leaders such as Spears and Wiles say to them.

The Wiles analogy of agriculture's demonstration and experimental farms hit home with the writer who has spent the past four years as director of a campus-laboratory school which has a role based on experimentation and research, and in which the show-casing of innovative practice is an important function. One of the basic ideas chosen for experimentation, then for show-casing, by the staff of Hebeler School (the campus-laboratory school of Central Washington State College) is the idea of the multigraded, planning-teaching team. As this procedure became easier for the faculty to work with, an interesting thing happened to the problem of inservice education. It ceased to be a problem. In order to understand how this welcome byproduct was possible, one needs to examine the idea of the planning-teaching team. To this end, a brief discussion of the idea follows, along with an example of how inservice education has become a regular function of the teams at Hebeler.

The Multigrade Planning-Teaching Team

How best to organize for instruction? Elementary school experience with the self-contained room suggests real value in the teacher knowing the child well; yet, specialization as practiced in the secondary school suggests real value in the teacher knowing the subject well. Experience, then, would seem to give weight to two assumptions about teaching:

1. The effective teacher *knows* his learners.

2. The effective teacher *knows* the content of the subject area in which he teaches, and the processes basic to it.

If one accepts these assumptions as being operational, then one is faced with having to acknowledge some apparent weaknesses in both the self-contained and departmentalized plans of organization. The self-contained setting, while making it possible for the teacher to know his learners, also carries with it an overwhelming number and variety of teaching and planning tasks. While the departmentalized scheme helps to limit the planning and teaching tasks, it is overwhelming in terms of pupil contact, and tends to lead to compartmentalized thinking. In view of the dilemma described above, the Hebeler School staff concluded that alternatives to the two plans must be explored.

As the exploration was undertaken, so too was undertaken the task of developing and implementing an individualized, continuous-progress, process-oriented instructional program—that is, a program of school experiences in which the pupil may always move forward at his own best pace and in terms of his developing interests, and one in which both what one learns and how one learns (content and process) are important.

Keeping in mind extensions of the two key assumptions: (1) that the better the teachers come to know the pupils, the better are the chances for appropriate planning and teaching, and (2) that some degree of specialization in the various subject areas increases the potential of the instructional program, the Hebeler School staff initiated the multigrade, planning-teaching team project.

Each multigrade team at Hebeler School is responsible for three class-sized groups of pupils—in traditional terms either one each of grades one, two, and three, or, of grades four, five, and six. Hence, only about one-third of the pupils assigned to a team are "new" to the team members each year. Instructional leadership is shared by the team members, each specializing to a degree in one or two areas. In the Hebeler plan, a member of each team serves as team leader, a coordinating role.

Responsibility of leadership in an area includes keeping the team members current with research and practice in that area, and giving direction to the instructional planning. In this plan of organizing, individual teacher strengths and preferences are utilized, and inservice education becomes a part of the daily operation. Teams establish procedures for making decisions, and make the decisions.

Operationally, the team at Hebeler School have developed an instructional program, and have assumed the responsibility of organizing themselves and the pupils for instruction. Changing demands of planning and of instruction make flexibility in teaching and its planning a must. This flexibility has become one of the obvious strengths of the teams at Hebeler. Pupils are met in large groups, class-size groups, small groups, and individually. They are met not only in terms of individually appropriate content and concepts, but also in terms of self-direction (or lack of it). An instructional goal is independence in learning.

The teams meet regularly and for varying lengths of time. Members have found that they have much work to do, as well as much to report, discuss, analyse, think about, and plan. As communication barriers disappear, planning is accomplished more quickly, leaving an increasing amount of time for evaluation, consideration of specific problems, thinking about individual learners, and an assessment of all that is occuring.

Team Planning and Inservice Education

An example of how inservice education has become almost a daily part of team planning at Hebeler School may help the reader more clearly to see the potential. The teams have had valuable experiences in planning for most areas of the curriculum. The experience in the language arts is reviewed very briefly, here.

The area of the language arts traditionally has presented a constantly frustrating mixture of inservice needs, including problems with points-of-view, skill and understanding, enthusiasm, and apprehension. How to present the "right" language arts in-

service education at the "right" time is of continuing concern.

The planning-teaching team procedure makes the problem somewhat less complicated. Through discussion at the time a question arises or a need occurs, and by example and demonstration teaching, the language arts leaders conduct a constant program of inservice education—a program very much bolstered by an on-the-job training situation and regular feedback. Language arts activities appropriate for individuals are now regular occurances.

Creative writing, with its requirements for stimulation, appropriate help and sensitivity, demands careful attention if damage rather than help is not to result. The teachers at Hebeler School contend they have made observable progress in this area, and the remarkable volume of writing by pupils which has taken place is impressive testimony. Skill needs of individual learners become apparent from this writing, and the individuals frequently are motivated through their writing to want to master these skills. The team language arts specialist can quickly move to where his service is needed most.

The areas of oral presentations and group decision-making present a vast array of demands for differentiated instruction quite outside the experience of many teachers. Yet, with a competent individual immediately available to ask for help, to discuss problems with, and to watch, teachers can increase their effectiveness and security in these crucial language arts activities. Because the situation has led to making the most of available time and resources, the tasks facing the language arts specialists have been possible to deal with rather than becoming mired in frustration and disinterest.

If one views the experiences at Hebeler School as an indication of the potential of planning-teaching teams for solving some of the important problems of inservice education, then the experiences briefly discussed can serve as clues for action in other settings. As has been seen, the proper setting can make it possible for leadership to emerge, strengths to be built on, and weaknesses to be overcome. A look at the Spears principles and the Wiles activities presented earlier point up the fact that the planning-teaching team makes most of these principles and activities automatically operational.

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